

Dear Fellow East Siders:

This week's ward letter discusses the School Board's review of proposed changes at Vartan Gregorian and Nathan Bishop schools, the public's right to comment at Building Board of Review meetings, and the Economic Development Task Force report.

Last Wednesday, the School Board considered proposals to move the pre-kindergarten special education classes out of Vartan Gregorian and to add a third class of behaviorally disturbed students to Nathan Bishop. I joined parents stating concerns about these changes. For Gregorian, the School Department presented a detailed map identifying the location of every child currently attending the program to make its case that the change would benefit the majority of affected children. I have asked to review the map in more detail. Regarding Bishop, the Superintendent stated that she is working on an alternative, correctly noting that Bishop already has more than its share of this particular population. At the same meeting, the School Board stated that its budget includes a second assistant principal for Bishop, bringing it into parity with other middle schools. I have been advocating for this change for two years, and am pleased to learn of its implementation.

On Tuesday night (April 22) at 6:00 p.m. on the third floor of City Hall, the Ordinance Committee will review an [Ordinance](#) I introduced to clarify the public's right to comment at meetings of the Building Board of Review. The proposal responds to an incident that occurred last month when the Building Board of Review did not allow a number of residents to comment at one of these meetings. Because of the complexity of the Code of Ordinances, it is not possible to enact a single ordinance that addresses all of these situations, but to date the City Council has been supportive of protecting the public's right, in the first instance, to participate at all public meetings of City boards and commissions, barring significant countervailing considerations.

At last Thursday's meeting, the City Council formally accepted the [Final Report](#) of the Economic Development Task Force, a "blue ribbon panel" of local business leaders, experts and City officials. In the wake of the vacancy of the Superman Building last Spring, the Task Force was organized to review the policies the City can implement to encourage economic development. The Report presents a vision of (1) a more competitive tax and regulatory environment, (2) quality of life, (3) knowledge-based industries, (4) a skilled workforce and (5) a revived Superman building. The main recommendation is to develop a long-term development plan, a Cabinet officer and a Council of Economic Advisors. The plan would incorporate a number of long-term goals, including a significant reduction in the commercial tax rate. I support the broad goals of the Task Force, but do not know if those calls are feasible to implement. More specifically, this Report, similar to others prepared and issued by City task forces and committees over the few years, makes recommendations about increasing the City's investment in a particular sector (in this case tax relief) without identifying either the cost of the investment or a way to pay for it. It is easy to comment on the size of the City's overall budget and suggest it has to be large enough to fund a particular initiative, but such a comment fails to account for the fact that there are many competing initiatives for the same limited resources. We have legislation that requires the presentation of the fiscal impact of all proposed ordinances; perhaps we need similar legislation to govern the reports we receive from task forces.

Sincerely,

